



Responding to Communication

Change in understanding

Until recently, autism was seen as a medical issue, and as a series of deficits compared to “normal” human functioning.

We now know that autism is a different neurology, so the person’s brain takes in, understands and responds to information differently. When we understand and appreciate how each individual young person processes information, we are better able to create meaningful relationships together and develop mutual understanding.

When this was not understood, people used to treat autism as a behavioural issue and try to train autistic people to behave differently. This caused a lot of stress and trauma.

What is Planned Ignoring?

One example of this practice is called Planned Ignoring. Planned Ignoring involves deliberately ignoring targeted child behaviours. Unfortunately, some people still recommend this.

Imagine if a child kept asking for the same thing over and over. If the adults around them ignore this for long enough, the child will stop asking.

Success, right? Very wrong.

Understanding the child

We know now that humans relate and learn best when in calm, trusting relationships. So, it’s important to understand why the child keeps repeating the same thing and to try and find a way forward.

Maybe they are anxious and need reassurance? Maybe they have no sense of time and don’t know for sure will they ever again get the item they are requesting? Maybe they are having a chat with you in the best way they know how? Maybe they are vocally stimming?

As an adult, listening and responding empathetically to their communication is really important. Over time that can help to reduce their anxiety. Having a schedule (visual or written) with their desired item on it will let them know they will receive it again. This may need to be paired with a timer.

<https://monadelahooke.com/the-hidden-costs-of-planned-ignoring/>